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AUTHOR Licata, Christine M.
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ABSTRACT

Factors that have led to post-tenure evaluation of faculty are considered, along with concerns that should be examined before designing a post-tenure review process. Post-tenure evaluation is not in opposition to the principle of tenure and to policy statements about tenure issued by the American Association of University Professors, provided that the evaluation is not used as grounds for dismissal and that any recommended dismissal is subject to normal academic due process. Those who support the process view it as a formative way to reinforce faculty growth and improve instruction. Some proponents also suggest its usefulness in decisions about merit pay, promotion, and dismissal for cause. Criticisms of the process include the view that it will devalue rigorous pretenure evaluation and will erode collegial relationships. Before starting a post-tenure review process, colleges should: clearly articulate the purpose of the evaluation; involve faculty in the design of the plan and make sure faculty and administrators agree about specifics; emphasize flexibility and individualization; and link faculty development and rewards and post-tenure evaluation. (SW)

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# Post-tenure Faculty Evaluation

Christine M. Licata, Rochester Institute of Technology

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Evaluation of faculty performance and assessment of faculty vitality are processes critical to institutional livelihood and renewal. As the higher education community approaches the next decade, greater attention to faculty evaluation can be expected, and there is reason to believe that this attention will not only be directed to an examination of faculty evaluation practices before tenure but will also encompass the evaluation of faculty performance and vitality following tenure—that is, post-tenure evaluation.

The degree of interest and amount of resources applied to these processes have ebbed and flowed over time, tempered by the environmental factors that surround institutions of higher education. The National Commission on Higher Education Issues (1982) recently identified post-tenure evaluation as one of the most pressing issues facing higher education in the next decade. In its summary report, the commission strongly urged that "campus academic administrators working closely with appropriate faculty committees should develop a system of post-tenure evaluation" (p. 10). It also suggested that "nothing will undermine the tenure system more completely than its being regarded as a system to protect faculty members from evaluation" (p. 10) and recommended that a system of post-tenure evaluation be developed on campuses to help ensure faculty competence and strengthen institutional quality (p. 10).

Not all factions in the higher education community support this notion or see the necessity for establishment of such a system, however. Participants at the 1983 Wingspread Conference, Committee A of the AAUP on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and other scholars in the field voice serious reservations about institutions developing formalized procedures for review of tenured faculty. They believe that sufficient evaluation already occurs and that additional periodic institutional evaluation of tenured faculty would reap little benefit, would be very costly, not only in money and time but also in the diminution of creativity and collegiality, and would ultimately threaten academic freedom.

Clearly, discourse on this topic engenders some very disparate views.

## What Factors Influence Current Attention to Post-tenure Evaluation?

Educational planners characterize the next decade in higher education as one wrought with budgetary restraint, steady-state reallocations, declining enrollments, and overall problems of retrenchment. Of equal concern are the predictions that by the late 1980s, approximately 80 percent of faculty will be tenured at institutions where a tenure system operates and that by 2000, the modal age of tenured faculty will be between 55 and 65. These factors are further compounded by the fact that the absence of job mobility and the shortened span of the career ladder have conspired to produce a feeling among some faculty of being "stuck."

In the past, efforts to foster institutional flexibility focused on alternatives or modifications to the traditional tenure system. No conclusive evidence exists, however, to show that tenure adversely affects faculty productivity or teaching effectiveness. Likewise, no substantial evidence suggests that either the abrogation of tenure or the various modifications to tenure schemes are superior to a tenure system (Chait and Ford 1982). The question then becomes, "Can institutions committed to a tenure system yet faced with an uncertain fiscal future reconcile their need to establish some degree of flexibility

with the equally critical need to maintain the quality and vitality of the institution and the faculty?" It is precisely in this context that discussion about post-tenure evaluation emerges.

## Is Post-tenure Evaluation Compatible with the Principle of Tenure?

Post-tenure evaluation is not in opposition to the principle of tenure and to AAUP policy statements about tenure, provided that the evaluation is not used as grounds for dismissal and that any recommended dismissal is subject to normal academic due process. The AAUP/AAC Commission on Academic Tenure in 1973 recommended that post-tenure evaluation could improve the operation of tenure. Some commentators studying this question also suggest that post-tenure evaluation can strengthen rather than diminish the value of tenure (Bennett and Chater 1984; Chait and Ford 1982; Olswang and Fantel 1980-81).

## Do Observers Agree About the Purpose and Value of Post-tenure Evaluation?

The strongest support for post-tenure evaluation is voiced by those who view it as a formative way to reinforce faculty growth and to improve instruction (Bennett and Chater 1984; Zuckert and Friedhoff 1980). Some proponents also suggest its usefulness in decisions about merit pay, promotion, and dismissal for cause.

Apprehension and skepticism about the development of a formal institutional system for periodic review are expressed by those who fear that such systems are unworkable, will undermine the tenure principle by allowing the termination of tenured faculty, will devalue rigorous pretenure evaluation, and will erode collegial relationships (AAUP 1983).

## What Conclusions and Recommendations Emerge from This Study?

Institutions interested in developing a process for post-tenure review should carefully investigate the potential advantages and disadvantages that such a system might eventuate. Institutional type, climate, and mission are intervening variables that may affect the advisability and feasibility of establishing such a process. For institutions wishing to pursue this notion further, the following considerations should be thoroughly examined before design and implementation of a process for post-tenure review:

1. The purpose of the evaluation should be clearly articulated, and all other aspects of the evaluation plan should tie directly to the established purpose. Institutions must decide whether the evaluation will be formative or summative in purpose.
2. Faculty must be involved in the design of the plan, and commitment by the administration must be evident.
3. Faculty and administrators should agree on the specifics of the plan. Particular attention should be given to the need for multiple sources of input, identified areas and criteria for assessment, and agreement on standards for assessment.
4. Flexibility and individualization should be emphasized in the plan and in the criteria used for evaluation. Evaluation schemes must respond to the transitional stages in an academic's life while at the same time recognizing institutional priorities.
5. Strong evidence supports the link between faculty development and rewards and post-tenure evaluation. Such a link is critical in a formative evaluation scheme.
6. Innovative approaches to planning and evaluation are needed. The concept of growth contracts deserves renewed attention.

Basic to each of these considerations is the need for expanded research on the status, the practices, and the effectiveness of current post-tenure evaluation plans.

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